

## **Early Childhood Recommendations for KBE Priorities 2005-06**

**Priority.** There is a substantial body of research literature that documents the importance of the early years to later learning. Attention to the healthy development of the whole child in quality early childhood settings paves the way to successful learning over the life span. It is clear that high quality preschool programs/experiences significantly reduce achievement gaps. With this knowledge, the Kentucky state-funded preschool program was established in 1990 under the Kentucky Education Reform Act to provide comprehensive services for 4-year-olds at-risk of educational failure and 3- and 4-year old children with disabilities. Research has demonstrated that Kentucky's preschool program has been effective in improving the skills of the children served and this progress persists over time.

Additionally, school leaders have realized the benefits of a full-day kindergarten program and have gradually supplemented the state supported program at local expense. In fact, 146 school districts now offer full-day programs and only 30 districts are without at least one full-time program. Last year there were 633 full-day programs and 159 half-day programs in Kentucky. The number of full-day programs has increased by recent local board actions.

**Current Status.** Kentucky's preschool program currently serves 20,312 eligible children; 61% of these children have special needs. Together with the Head Start program, Kentucky serves more than 37,000 preschool children. For the past 8 years the enrollment has increased yet per child rates are lower than initial funding. Funds given to the districts to operate the preschool program do not meet the full cost of operating the quality programs. However Kentucky continues to move forward to increase quality through the *Building a Strong Foundation for School Success* series that includes the *Early Childhood Standards* aligned to the Program of Studies K-12, *Parent Guides* to the Standards, the *Continuous Assessment Guide*, and *Quality Self-Study*. Kentucky ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the area of access to preschool for 4 year olds, 3<sup>rd</sup> for access to preschool programs for 3 year olds, and met 7 of 10 quality indicators according to the National Institute for Early Education Research.

As the preschool program has matured, one major area of improvement has been the progress toward hiring early childhood certified teachers. All new preschool teachers are required to have the birth to primary teaching certificate, and there is no indication of statewide shortages for teachers holding this certification.

Full-day kindergarten has been implemented in most districts, but with only half-day provided by the state.

**Next Level** To maintain current accomplishments additional funding must be provided. To achieve any further level of progress with the preschool program, additional funding must be provided. One recommendation for the Board would include amending the preschool regulations to require that districts incorporate the *Building a Strong Foundation Series, Standards, Assessment, Quality Self-Study*. Another recommendation would be to extend the eligibility criteria to include reduced lunch eligible, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) children, moving to include children in the preschool program whose families are at or below 200% of poverty. Another suggestion would be to additionally establish additional resources to

programs/classrooms who are identified as Centers/Classrooms of Excellence” throughout the state.

To fund kindergarten for full-day will cost the state an additional \$111,300,000 for 2006. This should be continued as an on-going part of SEEK funding.

**Kentucky Board of Education Role** In order to achieve the goal of proficiency for every child, the Kentucky Board of Education must ensure that the preschool program is adequately funded. The Board members are encouraged to support and uphold the preschool regulations with support of developmentally appropriate practices, comprehensive services, a focus on developing the whole child, and continuing to hire certified teachers into the program. It is recommended that the Board members become “Ambassadors” to convey the message of the importance of quality early childhood programs both with the public and with the legislature. Adequate funding for the preschool program has been on the KBE agenda as a priority for several years. It is vitally important that the Board work with the Governor and the legislature to ensure increased funding for Kentucky’s preschool program. The future of our children depends on it.